

the Department of Defense recommendations. The Congress intended that it be an open process, a thoughtful process, but most importantly an intellectually rigorous process.

While the economies of many of our communities are at stake, this is not the most important reason that we have a BRAC process. This process is intended to assure the Congress and the people that our national security objectives are not compromised in the quest to save money. We know the BRAC process is well underway. It is high time that the Defense Department shed some sunlight on the reasons for their recommendations. The good people of interior Alaska should not be left in the position of defending the future of Eielson Air Force Base on June 15 with both hands tied behind their back, and they should not have to be burning the midnight oil in the hours leading up to that hearing studying material that should have been provided weeks earlier. They do not deserve it, we do not deserve it, and our Nation's security certainly deserves better than this.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALLEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The majority leader is recognized.

DEMOCRACY IN LEBANON

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this Sunday the people of Lebanon will go to the polls to vote in their first truly free election in three decades. Since 1990, Lebanon has been occupied by Syrian forces, but this spring the people of Lebanon made history. On March 8, hundreds of thousands of people descended upon Martyrs Square in Beirut, Lebanon's capital, and inaugurated what has become known around the world by people who viewed it as the Cedar Revolution.

For 2 weeks the word spread from city to city and to the countryside. It was clear that freedom was on the march. On March 18, 10 days later, a crowd of 1.5 million people, nearly half of the Lebanese population, gathered in that very square, Martyrs Square, to demand, to insist upon, the withdrawal of Syrian troops and its intelligence apparatus from Lebanon.

These brave and proud citizens of all ages, religions, and ethnicities stood shoulder to shoulder waving their nation's flag in solidarity. Together, with the support of freedom-loving democracies everywhere, they brought an end to Syrian occupation. In less than 2 months, 20,000 Syrian troops pulled out of the country. It was an astonishing wave of events broadcast on television sets and computer screens around the globe.

Lebanon now joins the list of fledgling democracies taking their first bold steps into the future. All of this could not have happened without tremendous courage on the part of the Lebanese people. The determination and vision of one man, President Bush, made it possible. His commitment to democracy and unwavering belief in the fundamental equality of all human beings has wrought remarkable change indirectly, such as in Lebanon, and more directly around the world. Democracy is taking root in even the most inhospitable of lands.

By America's words and our deeds, we are emboldening those who seek freedom and peace. It is an unprecedented moment in the history of the Middle East.

I realized that yesterday as the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, was in our office in this Nation's Capitol. We discussed the future and the hope and the opportunity. As noted scholar and Middle East expert Fouad Ajami says:

The entrenched systems of control in the Arab world are beginning to give way.

Indeed, it is the autumn of the dictators.

I mention Lebanon in part because it has been on my mind the last 4 weeks. It was about 4 weeks ago that I and a delegation had the opportunity, the privilege, of traveling to Lebanon during our April recess. While in Beirut, I had the opportunity to walk through that square, Martyrs Square. I met with leaders of the Cedar Revolution. They represented a diversity of parties and religious sects—Christian, Druze, and Muslim. These leaders were well versed in the requirements for a successfully functioning democracy. In particular, they discussed the needs to restore transparency and accountability, the rule of law, to secure an independent judiciary and to build, to construct, to reconstruct their economy so that the Lebanese people maintain a stake in the future. Their commitment to freedom, to the rule of law, and democratic governance was truly inspiring.

There are many challenges ahead. We share the concern that Syrian intelligence officials have not fully withdrawn from Lebanon. We also know that this election will not, in any shape or form, be perfect. Few elections in times of transition are. But seeing firsthand the determination of the Lebanese people was truly inspiring. I came away optimistic that this moment will lead to a new age of freedom and democracy for the Lebanese people.

In the words of Vaclav Havel, I urge the people of the region:

to never forget these days full of solidarity, hope and common quest for freedom and truth.

To the Lebanese people:

It may be a long and difficult road, but please have faith that the destination is well worth the journey.

SENATOR AND ERMA BYRD'S 68TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, on another issue, an issue that was discussed by several of my colleagues, most notably Senator STEVENS, our distinguished colleague from Alaska, the President pro tempore, I rise to honor now a very special day in the life of one of our most respected and venerable colleagues.

On Sunday, the distinguished senior Senator, ROBERT BYRD, celebrates his 68th wedding anniversary with his beloved wife and high school sweetheart Erma Ora James.

The courtship is well known to our colleagues. It is hard to do it full justice, but I will give it a try. The two met in Raleigh County over 7 decades ago, where Erma's father had been transferred from Virginia to work in the coal mines. Senator BYRD had a friend who brought pocketfuls of gum and candy to school, and each day the young ROBERT BYRD would wait at the schoolhouse door and ask his friend for a few pieces of candy. He put them in his pocket and at the first opportunity he would present the candies to Erma as a love offering.

Senator BYRD has said he wasn't really sure if his Erma knew that she was his sweetheart, but she must have found out because the couple ultimately was married in 1937. The day after their wedding, Senator BYRD gave his new bride his wallet which contained several hundred dollars that, over the days and weeks and months, he had saved. He told her that she would be the head of their family finances forever. To this day, Senator BYRD doesn't carry a wallet.

He has said that Erma has been his anchor all these years. They are truly blessed to have one another, their family, and a lifetime of shared memories.

The Bible says:

A man will leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

For nearly 7 decades, Senator BYRD and his lovely wife Erma have lived up to the ideal of marriage. I commend them. I admire them. And I wish them both a very happy 68th anniversary.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have had a number of conversations the last couple of days with the distinguished majority leader about this issue of stem cell research. Dr. FRIST—and I say Dr. FRIST because it relates to this matter—indicated he was going to study